

WESTERN PRAIRIE ECOLOGICAL LANDSCAPE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN



INTRODUCTION

This document outlines the strategy for soliciting public review and input in the development of the regional plan for the Western Prairie Ecological Landscape. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) recognizes that sound planning is a partnership effort with the people it serves and that the end product must be broadly supported by them as well as fit the capabilities of the property. The DNR encourages citizen input throughout the planning process.

The regional plan will apply only to DNR-managed lands, and will be based on and influenced by existing statutes, administrative codes, scientific data, management opportunities and resource capabilities, surveys, judgment of resource management experts, and public opinion. The local and regional recreational supply and demand as well as economic and social characteristics also will be considered. The approved regional plan will represent the best roles of the properties in their local, regional, and statewide contexts.

THE REGION

The department has embarked on a regional approach to master planning, utilizing 16 regions known as Ecological Landscapes. These regions are distinct areas of the state that have different ecological attributes and management opportunities. They can be used to identify the best areas of the state to manage for various natural communities, key habitats, aquatic features, and native plants and animals.

The Western Prairie Landscape is located in western Wisconsin, encompassing St. Croix, Pierce counties with a small portions of Polk county. The regional plan will cover all DNR-managed lands in the Western Prairie. Visit the Western Prairie regional planning webpage for a complete list of properties included (<http://dnr.wi.gov/>, keyword “master planning”, then click on “Western Prairie Ecological Landscape”).

PLANNING PROCESS

The regional planning process is divided into three main phases.

Phase One: This phase is preparatory work. Reliable, current information on the resources of the properties, public uses, and regional demands and opportunities is needed as a foundation for the planning process. Prior to an announcement that planning is starting, the department updates natural resource and recreational use data for the properties and collects regional data in order to better understand the best capabilities of the properties and their present and potential functional role within the region.

Phase Two: Phase Two is plan development and public involvement. It begins with a formal public announcement that a regional plan will be developed. This announcement is soon followed by a public outreach process to share information and gather public input on important issues to be addressed in the plan. Draft goals and alternative management and use strategies are then developed and evaluated. The final step of this phase is the development of a draft plan. The public is a valued partner with the

department in each step of the plan's development. Opportunities for the public to provide input into these activities are discussed below.

Phase Three: Phase Three involves presentation of the draft regional plan to the Natural Resources Board for approval.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR PARTICIPATION IN PLANNING

The department's goals for public involvement in regional planning are to offer the public meaningful ways to be involved in shaping the future management and use of their favorite properties, and to provide a means for interested people to stay informed about the property and planning progress. Public review and comment will be formally sought at key milestones during the plan's development and approval process. However, it should be noted that public comments are welcome at any time. The formal public input points in the process are:

- At the beginning of the plan development process (Phase 2, discussed above) to help identify important issues to be considered in the plan;
- when the draft regional plan is released for public review and comment; and
- when the Natural Resources Board considers approval of the proposed master plan.

WAYS TO BE INVOLVED

Public Meetings: DNR staff will hold informal public informational meetings at key points during the planning process (described above) to present and discuss information on the properties and plan proposals, and receive comments and suggestions.

Public Input Forms: The department will issue public input forms to gather feedback from the public on various regional planning issues. These forms will be available online on the Western Prairie regional planning webpage and as hard copy at public meetings.

Other Ways to Comment: Comments may be submitted to the planning team at any time during the planning process by e-mail, regular mail, or by phone. Contact information is provided at the end of this document and online.

HOW THE DEPARTMENT WILL PROVIDE PLANNING INFORMATION TO YOU

News Releases: News releases will be issued at key stages during the planning process to announce public meetings, provide information updates, and to solicit public comments.

Direct Mailings (e-mail and regular mail): The department uses GovDelivery, an electronic notification service, to keep interested parties (landowners, user groups, sporting clubs, environmental groups, service groups, local government, state officials, affected Indian Tribes, local and state newspapers, etc.) informed about upcoming events and discussions. This email system is used at key points in the planning process to provide information about the properties and planning issues; and to announce meetings, decisions, and other planning developments. To sign up for GovDelivery notifications about the Western Prairie regional plan, visit <http://dnr.wi.gov>, keyword search "master planning", then click on "Western Prairie Ecological Landscape". You can then subscribe to GovDelivery bulletins by clicking the link next to

the red envelope symbol. You can also sign up for the mailing list by contacting the department using the contact information provided at the end of this document.

Web Page: The department will set up a special regional planning webpage where information about the properties, the planning process, draft plan documents, notices, planning progress reports, and other important planning information will be posted. Visit <http://dnr.wi.gov> and search for “master planning”.

Planning Reports: After each formal public input step the department will summarize the input received. Additional progress reports will be posted, as needed, on the regional planning website.

CONSULTATION WITH OTHER GOVERNMENTAL UNITS

As needed, throughout the planning process the department will consult directly with local governments, other state or federal agencies, and affected Indian Tribes on a government-to-government basis regarding mutual planning interests.

HOW PLAN DECISIONS WILL BE MADE

In developing an effective property master plan, the department listens to many voices. Recreation users, commercial interests, neighboring landowners, conservation groups, elected officials, other government agencies, tribal representatives, and other interested persons or groups are all encouraged to participate. Input received at each major step in the planning process will be considered as the plan is developed.

Decisions on which ideas to incorporate into the plan will be made based on the properties’ statutory designations (i.e. wildlife area, state park etc.), their physical/biological capabilities, the best role of the properties in their local, regional and state-wide context, and on the professional expertise of DNR staff. Further, the plan must comply with applicable federal laws, state statutes and administrative codes, department policies and procedures, and facility design standards. Every reasonable effort will be made to communicate the reasons for key plan decisions.

While a broad range of public interests and staff recommendations will be listened to and considered in developing a proposed master plan, the final decision-making responsibility and authority on the plan rests with the DNR’s citizen policy-making Natural Resources Board.

PLANNING CONTACT

For more information about the planning process, to provide comments, or to add your name to the mailing list, contact:

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